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Citation: Fenwick, John (2011) Managing Local Government under the Coalition : Rowing, Steering or Going Under? In: Northumbria Research Conference, 5-6 May 2011, Northumbria University, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

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Managing Local Government under the Coalition: Rowing, Steering or Going Under?

Professor John Fenwick, Newcastle Business School

This paper will consider the current challenges confronting managers and leaders in local government. Starting with Osborne and Gaebler's familiar dictum that public sector managers should be 'steering' (co-ordinating) rather than 'rowing' (controlling) local public services, the paper will ask whether even 'steering' has now become impossible under an increasing fragmentation of services (as in current changes to schools), a renewed emphasis on 'localism' (as in dismantling of regional planning and central performance systems) and yet another attempt to create new political management structures for our cities (as in current plans for directly elected executive mayors). If local government has long since stopped rowing, and is now no longer steering, is it going under? If so, what are the implications for our communities and for local governance and accountability?

The paper falls within the category 'People, Business and Society' and is intended to be of interest to a social science audience from several Schools across the University.